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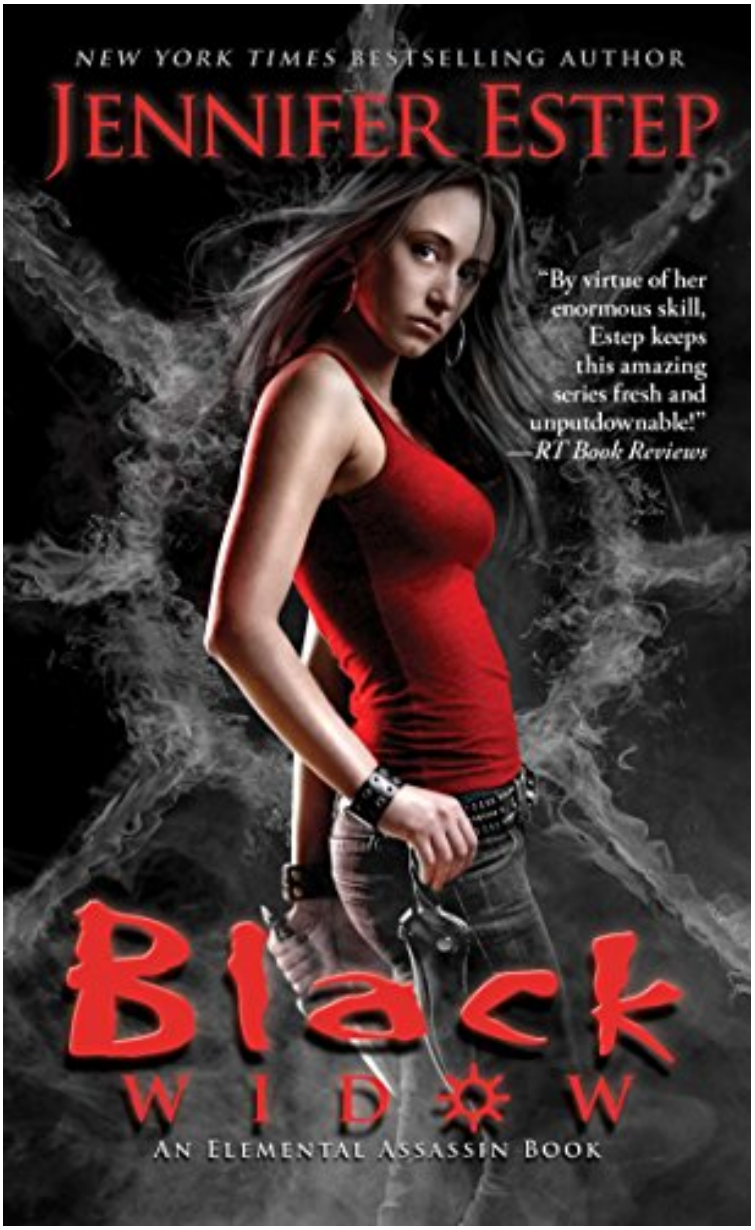
Black Widow



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Par Jennifer Estep
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(Free) Black Widow

Par Jennifer Estep : Black Widow before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Black Widow:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurLethal, sexy, and always ready to protect her friends, Gin Blanco (a.k.a. the Spider) takes on the mysterious M.M. Monroe in book twelve of the New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling Elemental Assassin urban fantasy series.Theres nothing worse than a cruel, cunning enemy with time to killand my murder to plan. With wicked Fire elemental Mab Monroe long gone, youd think I could finally catch a break. But someones always trying to take me down, either as Gin Blanco or my assassin alter-ago. Now along comes the Spiders new arch-nemesis, the mysteriously named M. M. Monroe, who is gleefully

working overtime to trap me in a sticky web of deceit. The thing is, Im not the only target. I can see through the tangled threads enough to know that every bit of bad luck my friends have been having lately is no accidentand that each unfortunate coincidence is just one more arrow drawing ever closer to hitting the real bulls-eye. Though new to Ashland, this M. M. Monroe is no stranger to irony, trying to get me, an assassin, framed for murder. Yet, as my enemys master plan is slowly revealed, I have a sinking feeling that it will take more than my powerful Ice and Stone magic to stop my whole life from going up in flames.ExtraitBlack Widow 1 It was torture. Watching your mortal enemy get everything shed ever wanted was torture, pure and simple. Madeline Magda Monroe stood off to one side of a wooden podium, her hands clasped in front of her strong, slender body and a serious, thoughtful expression on her beautiful face. Next to her, a city official sporting a brown plaid jacket and a gray handlebar mustache droned on and on and on about all the good things that her mother, Mab Monroe, had done for Ashland. Please. The only good thing Mab had ever done in her entire life was die. Something that Id been all too happy to help her with. Then again, thats what assassins did, and I was the Spider, one of the best. Madelines crimson lips quirked, revealing a hint of her dazzling white teeth, as though she found the same irony in the speakers words that I did. She knew precisely what a sadistic bitch her mother had been, especially since she was cut from the exact same bloodstained cloth. Still, even I had to admit that Madeline made an angelic figure, standing there so calmly, so serenely, in her tailored white pantsuit, as though she was truly enjoying listening to all of the prattle about Mabs supposed charitable works. It was high noon, and the bright sun brought out the coppery streaks in Madelines thick auburn hair, making it seem as if her long, flowing locks were strings of glowing embers about to burst into flames. But Madeline didnt have her mamas famed elemental Fire power. She had something much rarer and far more dangerous: acid magic. Madeline shifted on her white stilettos, making the sun shimmer on the silverstone necklace circling her throata crown with a flame-shaped emerald set in the center of it. A ring on her right hand featured the same design. Madelines personal rune, the symbol for raw, destructive power, eerily similar to the ruby sunburst necklace that Mab had worn before Id destroyed itand her. Just staring at Madelines rune was enough to make my hands curl into fists, my fingers digging into the scars embedded deep in my palmseach a small circle surrounded by eight thin rays. A spider rune, the symbol for patience. Mab had given me the scars years ago, when shed melted my spider rune necklace into my palms, forever marking me. I just wondered how many more scars her daughter would add to my collection before our family feud was settled. Id say that she looks like the cat who ate the canary, but we both know that shed just use her acid magic to obliterate the poor thing. The suave, drawling voice somehow made the words that much snarkier. I looked to my right at the man who was leaning against the maple tree that shaded us both, his shoulders relaxed, his hands stuffed in his pants pockets, his long legs crossed at the ankles. His hair was a dark walnut, blending into the trunk of the tree behind him, but amusement glinted in his green eyes, making them stand out despite the dappled shadows that danced over his handsome face. His ash-gray Fiona Fine suit draped perfectly over his muscular figure, giving him a casual elegance that was the complete opposite of my tense, rigid, watchful stance. Then again, Finnegan Lane, my foster brother, always looked as cool as an ice-cream sundae, whether he was out for a seemingly simple stroll in the park, wheeling and dealing as an investment banker, or peering through a snipers scope, ready to put a bullet through someones skull. Finn arched an eyebrow at me. Well, Gin? What do you say? I snorted. Oh, Madeline wouldnt use her acid magic herself. Shed manipulate someone else into killing the bird and the cat for herand have the poor fool convinced that it had been his idea all the while. He let out a low chuckle. Well, you have to admire that about her. I snorted again. That shes a master manipulator who likes to make people dance to the strings that she so gleefully wraps around them before they even realize whats happening? Please. The only thing I admire about her is that shes managed to keep a mostly straight face through this entire farce of a dedication. Finn and I were standing at the back of a crowd that had gathered in a park in Northtown, the rich, fancy, highfalutin part of Ashland that was home to the wealthy, powerful, and extremely dangerous. The park was exactly what youd expect to find in this part of Northtown: lots of perfectly landscaped lawns and towering trees with thick tangles of branches, along with an enormous playground that featured seesaws, swing sets, a sandbox, and a merry-go-round. It was a picturesque scene, especially given the beautiful blue-sky October afternoon and the rich, deep, earthy scent of autumn that swirled through the air on the faint breeze. But the pleasantly warm temperature and cheery rays streaming through the burnt-orange leaves over my head did absolutely nothing to improve my mood. At my harsh words, a couple of people turned to give me annoyed looks, but a cold glare from me had them easing away and facing the podium again. Finn let out another low chuckle. You and your people skills

never cease to amaze me. Shut up, I muttered. As the speaker droned on, my wintry gray gaze swept over the park, and I thought about the last time Id been hereand the men Id killed. A vampire and a couple of giants, some of Mabs minions, who were torturing and about to murder an innocent bartender before Id intervened. The swing sets, the merry-go-round, one of the lawns. Men had died all over this park, and Id even drawn my rune in the sandbox in a dare to Mab to come find me, the Spider, the elusive assassin who was causing her such consternation. And now here I was again, months later, confronted with the next Monroe who wanted to do me in. Sometimes I wondered if I could ever really escape the past and all the consequences of it. Mab murdering my mother and my older sister, then trying to kill me and my younger sister, Bria, leaving me alone, injured, and homeless. Fletcher Lane, Finns dad, taking me in and training me to be an assassin. My finally killing Mab earlier this year. All the underworld bosses whod been trying to murder me ever since then. The city official finally wrapped up his tediously long speech and gestured at Madeline. She stepped forward, reached up, and took hold of a black rope attached to an enormous white cloth that had been draped over the wrought-iron gate that arched over the park entrance. Madeline smiled at the crowd, pausing a moment for dramatic effect, before she yanked on the rope, ripping away the cloth, while giving an elaborate flourish with her free hand. Fancy, curlicued letters spelled out the new name in the black metal arch: Monroe Memorial Park. I glared up at the sign, wishing I had one of the blacksmith hammers that my lover, Owen Grayson, used in his forge, so I could kneecap the gate, send it crashing to the ground, and then knock out each and every one of those damn letters in the toothy smile of the arch. Especially the ones in Monroe. But, of course, I couldnt do that. Not now. Maybe late tonight, when the park was nice and deserted, and no one was around to see me vent my pent-up rage on an innocent sign. This wasnt the first dedication Id attended in the past few weeks. After finally making her grand appearance in Ashland back in September, Madeline had wasted no time in claiming her millions in inheritance as M.M. Monroe, moving into Mabs mansion, and letting everyone know that she intended to pick up all of her mothers business interests, legitimate and otherwise. I didnt know exactly what her master plan was, but Madeline had set about ingratiating herself with all sorts of civic, charitable, and municipal groups, saying she wanted to continue all of the good works her mother had funded while she was alive. Of course, she was lying through her perfect teeth, since Madeline was no more charitable than her mama had been. But if there was one thing that folks in Ashland responded to, it was cold, hard cashor at least the promise of it. And so the dedications had begun. A wing at the Briartop art museum, the train station, several bridges, a good chunk of the interstate that wrapped around the downtown loop, and now this park. Every few days, it seemed like someone was engraving, chiseling, painting, broadcasting, or proclaiming something else in Mabs name at dear, dutiful daughter Madelines teary and oh-so-grateful requests. And Id been to every single breakfast, luncheon, dinner, tea party, cocktail hour, coffee klatch, barbecue, and fish fry, trying to figure out what my new enemy was up to. But Madeline was an excellent actress; all she did was grin and make small talk and preen for the cameras. Every once in a while, I would catch her staring at me, a small smile playing across her lips, as though my obvious stakeouts were amusing her. Well, that made one of us. Of course, I had Finn digging into Madeline, trying to find out everything he could about her past, her personal life, and her finances, in hopes of finding a clue to what she was planning for me and the rest of the Ashland underworld. But so far, Finn hadnt been able to find anything out of the ordinary. Neither had Silvio Sanchez, my new self-proclaimed personal assistant. She had no criminal history. No massive debt load. No large cash withdrawals from her bank accounts. No sudden, hostile takeovers of any businesseslegal or otherwisethat Mab had once owned. And perhaps most telling of all, no late-night, hush-hush meetings with the underworld bosses. Yet. Still, I knew that Madeline had some sort of scheme in mind for me. Impending evil always made my spider rune scars itch in warningand anticipation of turning the tables on my enemies. Usually, Madeline ignored me at the dedications, but apparently, she wanted to chitchat today, because she shook hands with the official, then strolled in my direction. And she wasnt alone. Two people followed her. One was a giant bodyguard dressed in a white silk shirt and a black pantsuit, around seven feet tall, with light hazel eyes and a sleek bob of golden hair that curled under at the ends. The sun had reddened her milky cheeks, giving her skin a bit of hot, ruddy color and darkening the faint freckles that dotted her face. The other was a much shorter man, clutching a silverstone briefcase in front of him and dressed in a light gray suit that was even slicker and more expensive than Finns. A lions mane of hair wrapped around his head, the arches, dips, and waves as pretty and perfect as icing decorating a cake. His elegant silver coif hinted at his sixty-something age, despite the tight, tan, unlined skin of his face. Emery Slater and Jonah McAllister. Emery was the niece of Elliot Slater, whod been Mabs number one giant enforcer before Id taken credit for

killing him, while Jonah had been Mabs personal lawyer and someone whose many crimes Id taken great pleasure in exposing back during the summer. Needless to say, there was plenty of hate to go around among the three of us. Incoming, Finn murmured, straightening up, pushing away from the tree, and moving to stand beside me. Madeline stopped in front of me, with Emery and Jonah flanking her. The giant and the lawyer both shot me icy glares, but Madelines features were warm and welcoming as she sidled a little closer to me, and a serene smile stretched across her face. Why, Gin Blanco, she purred. How good of you to come out to my dedication today. And looking so... spiffy. I wore what I always wore: black boots, dark jeans, and a long-sleeved black T-shirt. Next to Madeline and her crisp white suit, I resembled one of the hoboes who sometimes slept in this park. Madeline might seem all sweetness and light on the outside, but on the inside, I knew that her heart was as full of venom and as vicious as mine. Why, Madeline, I drawled right back at her, you know that I wouldnt have missed it for the world. Yes, she murmured. You do seem rather fond of popping up everywhere I go. Well, you can hardly blame me for that. Its always so very lovely to see someone of Mabs stature honored in such small but touching ways. Madelines lips quirked again, as if she was having trouble holding back her laughter at my blatant lie. Yeah. Me too. Funny thing, though, I said. You know was Ive noticed? That Mabs name isnt actually on anything. Its always just Monroe Memorial this and Monroe Memorial that. Why, if I didnt know better, Id almost think that you were going around town putting your name on everything. Instead of your dearly departed mamas. Finn chuckled. Emery and Jonah shifted their cold stares to him, but Finn kept laughing, completely immune to their dirty looks. He was rather incorrigible that way. Madelines green eyes crinkled a bit at the corners, as if she was having to work to maintain her sunny smile. I think that youre mistaken, Gin. Im honoring my mother exactly the way that she would have wanted me to. And I think that you have as little love for your dead mama as I do. You couldnt care less about what she would have wanted. Anger flashed in Madelines eyes, making them flare an even brighter, more vibrant green, the same intense, wicked color as the acid that she could summon with just a wave of her French-manicured hand. She didnt like me calling her out on her true feelings for her mother, and she especially didnt like that Id pointed out that the dedications were all about her ego, not Mab. Good. I wanted to make her angry. I wanted to piss her off. I wanted to rile her up so much that she couldnt even see straight, much less think straight, especially when it came to me. Because thats when she would make a mistake, and I could finally figure out what her endgame was and how I could stop it before she destroyed everything and everyone I cared about. But who am I to judge? I drawled on. I wouldnt care either, not if she had been my mother. I guess its one of those little things that well just have to agree to disagree on. Madeline blinked, and she forced her crimson lips to lift a little higher. You know, I think that youre right. We are just destined to agree to disagreeabout a great many things. We stared each other down, our stances casual and our features perfectly pleasant but with a deadly, dangerous coldness lurking just below the smooth surfaces. Anyway, Im afraid I must be going, Madeline said, breaking the silence. I have another dedication to prepare for tomorrow. This ones at the library downtown. Ill be there with bells on. No, she said in a pleased voice. I dont think you will. But I do thank you for coming out here today, Gin. As you said, its always so very lovely to see you. Madeline smirked at me, then pivoted on her stiletto and moved back toward the podium, shaking hands and thanking all for their support and well wishes. Emery and Jonah each gave me one more hostile glare before they trailed after her. Soon the three of them were in the heart of the crowd, with Finn and me standing by ourselves underneath the maple. She really is something, Finn said in an admiring tone, his eyes locked onto Madelines lithe, gorgeous figure. Despite his being involved with Bria, Finn was still a shameless flirt who loved to charm every woman who crossed his path. He would never do that with Madeline, for obvious reasons, but that didnt keep him from ogling her for all he was worth. I scoffed and rolled my eyes. What? he protested. Shes like a black widow spider. I can admire the beauty of such a creature, even if I know exactly how deadly it is. Only you would think that being eaten during your postcoital bliss would be worth it. Finn shrugged, then flashed me a mischievous grin. But what a way to go. He stared at Madeline another moment before looking over the rest of the crowd. He must have spotted someone he knew, perhaps one of the clients at his bank, because he waved, murmured an excuse to me, and headed in the direction of a wizened old dwarf who was wearing a large pink sun hat and an even larger diamond solitaire that could have had its own zip code. Finn never missed an opportunity to mix business with pleasure, and a moment later, he was attached to the dwarfs side, having winked and wiggled his way past her female giant bodyguard. Finn gave the elderly woman a charming smile as he bent down and pressed a dainty kiss to her brown, wrinkled hand. Well, at least he was an equal-opportunity flirt. But I continued to watch Madeline, who was still shaking hands and was now standing

directly below the arch that bore her familys name. Maybe it was the way the sun was hitting the metal, but the word Monroe seemed to flicker and gleam with a particularly intense, sinister light, as though it were made out of some sort of black fire, instead of just sturdy old iron. Madeline noticed me staring at her and gave me another haughty, pleased smirk before turning her back and ignoring me completely. Emery and Jonah did the same, moving to flank their boss again. All I could do was stand there and watch my enemy have a grand old time, basking in the warm glow of everyones collective, attentive goodwill. Maybe Id been wrong when I told Finn that being eaten was the worst part. Maybe waiting for the black widow to kill you was the real torture.Revue de presse"Everything is that I adore about this series is right here and more so in Black Widow. There's expertly crafted fights, banter, and suspense that continued to keep me on the edge of my seat. I can't recommend this book enough and love being on the roller coaster ride that is Gin Blanco life. (All Things Urban Fantasy)"Black Widow is crazy good and Gin Blanco is still one of the best written heroines in urban fantasy. I was riveted from beginning to end." (Fiction Vixen)Gin Blanco is one of the most intriguing heroines on the scene. . . . If you have not gotten on the Gin bandwagon yet, do so today! (RT Book s)This series kicked off with a bang, and the action hasnt let up since. (Fresh Fiction)